



Business and the Workplace: 2004-05 Influenza Season

Background

Because of a shortage of influenza vaccine for the 2004-05 season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed interim recommendations to help direct vaccine to people at greatest risk from serious complications from the flu. For this influenza season, CDC recommends that people in the following groups be given priority for getting the flu shot (the inactivated influenza vaccine):

- all children aged 6-23 months,
- adults aged 65 years and older,
- persons aged 2-64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions,
- all women who will be pregnant during influenza season,
- residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities,
- children 6 months-18 years of age on chronic aspirin therapy,
- health-care workers with direct patient care, and
- out-of-home caregivers and household contacts with children aged <6 months.

Where supply is sufficient, inactivated influenza vaccine also is recommended for persons in the following additional priority groups:

- out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of persons in high-risk groups (e.g., persons aged ≥65 years; persons with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart or lung disease, or weakened immune systems because of illness or medication; and children aged <2 years); and
- all adults aged 50-64 years.

Many vaccine providers are using screening questionnaires to determine whether people fit into a priority group for vaccination with inactivated influenza vaccine. A form to assist businesses with the screening of employees is available at www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flugallery/pdf/vaccinescreeningform.pdf. This form may also be distributed and used as a self-screening tool.

Vaccine Redistribution

Businesses with influenza vaccination programs are encouraged to coordinate efforts with their vaccine supplier and cooperate in redistribution measures with their local public health agencies to address the critical needs of high-risk patients in their area.

Anticipated shortages of inactivated influenza vaccine this flu season constitute a medical emergency within the meaning of Section 503(c) (3) (B) (iv) of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FDC Act), as determined by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It is therefore permissible under the FDC Act for a hospital or health care entity, such as a workplace health service, to redistribute influenza vaccine to alleviate shortages during the 2004-05 influenza season.

When redistribution occurs, the health-care entity redistributing influenza vaccine should document and maintain the following information:

- vaccine brand name
- manufacturer and distributor
- lot number
- number of doses transferred

Business and the Workplace: 2004-05 Influenza Season

(continued from previous page)

- recipient's name and address

In any such redistribution, the influenza vaccine and its transfer must comply with FDA's current good manufacturing requirements. Information on proper handling, storage, and shipping can be found at www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/vac_mgt_book.htm#flu. Additionally, public health preparedness legal materials are available at www.phppo.cdc.gov/od/phlp/influenza.asp.

Other Ways for Preventing the Flu

Businesses are asked to remember that vaccination is not the only way to prevent the spread of influenza in the workplace:

- Assure that a continuous supply of hand soap is available in wash rooms.
- Provide tissue supplies for employees.
- Promote messages to employees on actions they can take to protect themselves and others
 - Avoid contact with people who are sick
 - Stay home if you are sick
 - Clean your hands frequently
 - Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
 - Consult with your doctor about the use of antiviral medications if you do become ill with the flu.

The live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV), sold commercially as FluMist®, is a vaccination option for all healthy persons 5-49 years of age who are not pregnant. This is a good option for health-care workers who do not care for severely immune compromised persons, household contacts of children younger than 6 months, household contacts of pregnant women who are likely to deliver during the influenza season, and household contacts of other high-risk persons in addition to other healthy adults 5-49 years of age.

Additional Resources

Educational materials and downloadable posters for preventing the spread of influenza in the workplace are available through the CDC at www.cdc.gov/flu/groups.htm.

CDC also has a new central telephone hotline, 1-800-CDC-INFO (4636), available in English and Spanish, around-the-clock, every day of the week.

- Employee health services can call to report cases of influenza or flu-like illness in their workplace. They can also report that they have influenza vaccine, and that information will be used in combination with state health department information to direct allocation of remaining vaccine.
- Employees and other members of the public can call the number for information about influenza and influenza activity this season and to report when they cannot find vaccine in their communities. CDC will keep information about inactivated influenza vaccine availability by zip code and share it with states as decisions are made about directing vaccine to where it's needed most.
- All of this information will help determine where vaccine is and where it's needed most.

Other information sources:

- Local public health department information about the influenza vaccine shortage is available at www.naccho.org/general1225.cfm.
- State public health contact information is available on the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials Web site at www.astho.org/index.php?template=regional_links.php.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu, or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6358 (TTY).

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Page 2 of 2